



Photos by MSgt. Scott. Martin

A1C Oswaldo Garibay scans the airfield from a tower on the Tuzla AB flightline.

Base cops provide security in Bosnia – Herzegovina

By MSgt. Scott Martin
Public affairs

When USAFE officials selected the 48th Security Police Squadron as the best large SP unit in the command for 1996, they no doubt considered many aspects of the 48th SPS performance during the year.

One aspect of the unit's history has been it's involvement in two unique and historical operations in the Balkans — operations Joint Endeavor and Joint Guard.

Twenty-eight members of the 48th SPS recently returned from their nearly four-month tour of duty with the 4100th Group (Provisional) at Tuzla AB, Bosnia – Herzegovina, a tour they began in December as part of Operation Joint Endeavor and ended as part of Operation Joint Guard.

But regardless of the operation's name, the RAF Lakenheath cops had one mission at Tuzla.

"To provide a secure environment for Air Force assets," said TSgt. Donald Bleistein, who was the 4100th GP(P) security police superintendent before he returned home with his flight March 22.

In many ways, the security police job at Tuzla is very similar to what many cops do in England every day — flightline security. But security at Tuzla is carried out under vastly different conditions than here, and under another name — force protection.

With just more than 200 people assigned, the 4100th GP(P) operates the only air bridge into NATO's Multi-National Division, North — the American sector of Bosnia – Herzegovina. Located in the heart of a country fractured by fierce civil war, Tuzla AB is in the middle of what is still considered a war zone.

Just because there's peace now doesn't mean there are no hostile threats, a fact Lakenheath security police saw for themselves during their time at Tuzla. In February, one 48th SPS member was directly responsible for averting what may have been a hostile incursion onto the base.

One night while teaching security police augmentors how to use a thermal-imaging device, SrA. Martin Ratkowski was scanning the southern perimeter of the base from his position in a lookout tower, when he spotted what he called a "hot spot" just outside the perimeter fence

"I thought, 'all right, we'll see if this thing moves,'" he said. "At the same time, there was an Army patrol walking in that direction. I called to give them a heads-up that there may be something there. When the Army patrol stopped, the person got up and moved a little bit away, because the Army patrol was right on top of him."

Using his thermal imager to maintain sight of the potential intruder and the Army patrol, Ratkowski directed three Army Bradley Fighting Vehicles to the area where the vehicle crews could use their own thermal imagers to search for the intruder.

Apparently sensing he or she was seen, the intruder left the area without causing any trouble, although that may have been their intention.

"Let's just say their actions indicated they had some kind of military training," said SSgt. Stacy Pierpoint, flight sergeant. "They knew what they were doing; they weren't just kids."

This was one of several known instances of people seen near the perimeter of the base and gave weight to the security police mission of force protection.

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A1C Greg Lamonica at the Tuzla AB entry control point during a snow storm.